

4 RELIGION BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

121 beds. All these lands will never again become what they once
727 were—regions of constant struggle and short-lived serenity, of poverty and its exploitation, of poetry, fervor, and sadness. Those of us who have, for example, seen peasant women trudging for many miles through the omnipresent dust to kneel for an hour at the shrines of Silesia will never forget either the fact or its meaning.

781 There is not a foot of the old soil of Central Europe which
156 has not been consecrated by endurance for the sake of the things of the spirit and the mind. Indeed, I have sometimes wondered, reading the Polish and Silesian poets and novelists, why the longing to hold out should have persisted during many difficult centuries—why, for instance, Polish forests in thrall to the Czars should have hidden priest and ritual with such fidelity. Perhaps the explanation, in so far as it is of this world, can be found in the deep human urge for the preservation of identity. Custom and language were vital symbols of the self, and without them men felt they could not live. But stronger than all else was the deep, primitive, mystical desire for identification with Eternal Righteousness, manifest to the believer in the life of the Redeemer. To give up the faith was to surrender not merely one's self but the world as well.

● 798 To be sure these men and women were very human, often
563 poverty-stricken and untutored, sometimes intolerant and oppressive. The effort to conserve themselves and their identity spilled over into moments of vengeful outrage inflicted upon others because they were different. Thus anti-Semitism has a long history in Eastern Europe studded with bloody pogroms. Although curbed in Austro-Hungarian regions it was latent there, too, as the shameful events of 1938 proved, but manifest elsewhere continuously with varying intensity. Or who can forget the repression of the Ukrainians in Poland under the Pilsudski government, the conflict between Czechs and Slovaks,

or the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from their homes during 1945, an action flagrantly in violation of the principles for which the war against Nazism had been fought?

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Against this background one must set the figures of those who, whether of the clergy or of the laity, lived and preached the law of charity. Nowhere more than amongst such men—Princes of the Church, professors, men of affairs, labor leaders, simple religious, and common people—was this law manifest. It is imperative that their memory be not obscured, now that so mighty an army of the mean and servile has arisen. Let us note what we shall have mournful occasion to repeat again and again. Marxism, which had its rise in the concern of intellectuals for the worker, and which formulated that concern in terms of a materialist version of the Hegelian dialectic, has come round with Stalin to the view that the laboring man must have no intellectuals on his side. To suppress élites has become the cornerstone of the totalitarian theory of practical politics. That is why the peoples in chains retain their passions and their weaknesses, their hatreds and their greed, while those who might give them counsel or reasons for constraint are dead or silent.

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Then, too, there was the presence and also the example of the Ghetto. Place of reputed ignominy, of poverty, of rasping and grasping humanity, it was nevertheless awesomely, breathtakingly beautiful when the Sabbath eve descended upon it. Prayer became not so much what was engaged in but rather that which swept the world aside and created a wonderland of peace and holiness. One knew that in all the shabby little rooms which sheltered human beings in their wretchedness a fire had been lighted which had gleamed for thousands of years—the same leaping flame which had set the bush ablaze for Moses and had kindled the light that danced before the Ark of the Covenant. And though the vision of sanctification which now

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795 and peace would ensue. In so far as Catholics were concerned, tactful Papal diplomacy insured the continuance of the work of the Church, under altered conditions. But the position of all religions in Eastern Europe was considerably improved. New currents of thought and new forms of group action strengthened Protestantism. Anticlericalism gave way in many quarters to [793] a desire for cordial relationships with the churches. To a very considerable extent Eastern Europe profited by the extraordinary effectiveness and freshness of Christian theological and philosophical writing in France and Germany. But the strongest impetus came from the younger clergy, many of them veterans, who devised and directed new agencies to cope with social problems. It could no longer be said that Catholics, for example, were all bedfellows of special privilege. Confidence was nearly everywhere greater than it had been for generations. It is scarcely extravagant to say that if Hitler had not arisen to inflict doom and agony on countless millions, the great effort of Christian reconstruction in Eastern Europe might have succeeded.

- 798 The strangely magnetic and mentally diseased Austrian artist who became the dictator of Germany was the spokesman for a derouted, unhappy, and unsettled following. As his power was extended over Eastern Europe the Christian churches suffered only less horribly than Judaism. Priests were shot, sent to concentration camps, exiled from their parishes. Religious communities were suppressed, and their property and their schools were removed from under the jurisdiction of the Church; journals of religious opinion were silenced. The long catalogue of acts of oppression contains almost every kind of persecution save those spectacular mass executions by which the Jewish people were decimated. But at least it was made apparent that there was only one kind of opposition which the Nazis needed to fear—the refusal of faithful Christians, both

Catholic and Protestant, to accept one of the most flagrant heresies of all time. 798

There can be no doubt that Nazism dealt a crippling blow to religion, not only by reason of the attack on elites—men and women of intellectual status and forceful character, able to lead the people—but also because of the widespread perversion of youth which resulted from the activities of the Hitlerjugend and similar organizations. It is true that Hitler's attack on the Church lacked both the decisiveness and the skill which we have since come to identify with Communism. The Nazi intention was, however, to launch such an attack as soon as victory had been gained. Himmler's plans, as we study them in retrospect, bear the stamp of his diseased romantic imagination; but it may well be that in an hour of world-shattering victory he could have put them into effect. Fortunately there was no such triumph. Even so the scars left on the spirit of Europe by years of unrestrained and vicious Nazism will not be healed over for a long time to come. Thus, the Communist advance westward after the close of the war was aided on the one hand by the corrosion of spirit which was a bequest of Hitler, and on the other hand by the belief, prevalent in many quarters, that Sovietism was the opposite of German tyranny and was friendly to democratic institutions. This was unfortunately accepted as something close to self-evident truth in our own United States; so that there is little reason why we should wonder at the illusions of Europeans. 829

Stalin's road into one of the heartlands of the Christian faith was at all events open. The second stage in the passion of sorely tried peoples was to begin. How feeble the surviving elements of Liberalism, counted upon sometimes to impede the Russian dictator's progress, had become, is amply demonstrated by the fate of Eduard Beneš. Less imaginative and resourceful, less courageous or determined, few statesmen have seemed to be,

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of the State, to an extent undreamed of in Czarist Russia. We were wont, many of us, to make uncomplimentary references to the clergy of the old regime. Some of the strictures were too sweeping. But, alas, what we must be prepared to say about the Russian Church under the Soviets is far more devastating. It has become an institution which all but blesses the concentration camp system, and escorts slave labor to its doom with a kind of liturgical brass band.

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The Soviet objective is to reduce religious organizations outside Russia to the status of the Orthodox Church at home. The formula is always and everywhere the same, though it may be applied with greater or lesser rigor. Therefore inevitably the Vatican becomes the great antagonist, to be fought with every means. The Holy See, pledged to the profession of the Christian Gospels without dilution of the ethical obligations which they impose upon everyone who accepts them in the Catholic sense, cannot agree that the Church is to be an instrument of the State—even, indeed, a benign and merciful instrument. The Vatican is therefore the ignoble Fascist Beast of the Bolshevik Apocalypse. Upon the heads of persons who remain loyal to the ancient See of Catholic Christendom, blows have rained in constant succession. This is the direst persecution the Church has suffered since the days of the Caesars.

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Because most of what may be reported concerns the Catholic Church, a brief review of its history and endeavors in Eastern Europe will help to bring events into perspective. The cleavage of the Roman Empire, establishing the rivalry between the emperors of Rome and Byzantium, begot two Churches also, each claiming for itself the charisma of Apostolic Christianity. With the passing of time, profound differences of a dogmatic, moral, and canonical kind developed. The organizational character of religion was also modified radically, so that, while in the East the ties binding the religious nations to the historic pa-

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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In attempting to visualize the complex continuous effort by the Church in these lands to educate the people and to meet their physical and spiritual needs we deal not with an island in the stream of modern life—as we should if, for example, we set out to evaluate the influence of religion on the art, music, and architecture of present-day America—but verily with that stream itself. For example, the press that appeared under Catholic auspices in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia was a mighty force, in all its ramifications from the daily newspaper to the monthly periodical, for the shaping of public opinion. On the other hand, hospitals and refuges, schools and day nurseries, conducted for the most part under the supervision of religious orders, were almost the only institutions of such character to be found in some countries. Therefore the Communist onslaught upon this manifold activity was not merely against tradition but verily against action. It could not have succeeded unless its directors were safely established behind a dense array of Russian machine guns. It was an invasion resembling in some respects the earlier inroads from the East under which all these lands had suffered not once but many times. Assuredly the men in the Vatican, pondering the news each day, must often have let their thought return to times when Turk and Tartar bombarded the ancient citadels of once Christian Europe.

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We shall now summarize, though of necessity far too briefly, Protestant efforts to establish ecumenical union with the Russian Orthodox Church. On the one hand they resulted to some extent from the failure during the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIII to prepare the way for the union of the Anglican Church with Rome. This failure, it will be recalled, was in large measure due to Rome's decision that Anglican Orders were not valid. On the other hand, Protestant Churches in Eastern Europe often felt that the attitude of Russian Orthodoxy toward the State was more compatible with the traditional views of

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INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL POLICIES BETWEEN WARS 143

Due to the prevalence of a liberalism linked with nationalism - 186
ism, studies concentrated on history, which was generally 871
given a romantic interpretation. The study of geography was 814
heavily larded with political convictions and misinterpretations of ethnography. Although the universities of Czechoslovakia and Hungary were on a high academic level at a time when other universities were just becoming active, their students spent too much time in petty politics. Most of the student organizations supported some political person or party and, as a consequence, were strongly influenced by demagogues. The Polish and Rumanian universities especially were exploited by politicians, and often even by the police, for political purposes. Frequent political meetings aroused a discontented idealism and produced only too often regrettable chauvinistic or antisemitic behavior. 186 668

Anti-Semitism became a common denominator with which 798 ●
Hitler was able to unite the rising youth and the politicians of Eastern Europe. The responsibility for this state of affairs lay with the governments and the ruling groups.

Although the new boundaries had been drawn on the 563
principle of national self-determination, the mixture of nationalities in many areas, as well as historical and geographical factors, had resulted in the inclusion of important minorities within the new states. These minorities were fragments of peoples rather than whole nations as had been the case before the war and, since they were in many cases unwilling citizens of the new states, their presence constituted a grave problem. The eight million inhabitants of Poland, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia that spoke Russian, Ukrainian (Ruthenian), and White Russian as their mother tongue, the almost six million German-speaking citizens of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary, and the almost three million Hungarian-speaking inhabitants of neighboring Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia—these represented the most important, but by no means all, the minority